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RAISING BADGERS IN CAPTIVITY

The active demand for serviceable pelts of all kinds and the good prices received for badger skins have resulted in many attempts to raise badgers in captivity. Badger raising, however, is still in its infancy, and little can as yet be predicted as to its future. Fur farmers engaged in the experiments say that the animals tolerate pen conditions very well.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The badger is one of the larger of the members of the weasel family, having a broad heavy body and a short, muscular neck, though its head is rather small and pointed, and the ears are small and rounded. The forelegs are short, powerful, and well developed, with claws more than an inch in length and well adapted to burrowing, while the hind legs are small and the claws short.

The fur on the back varies from light to dark silvery gray. This blends to a yellowish white on the under side of the body. The head and neck are marked with a white stripe on top, and white patches appear also below the eyes and on the ears. The hair is longest on the sides of the body. Primeness of the pelt varies somewhat, but it is usually in best condition from the latter part of December to the middle of March.

PENS AND DENNS:

A great variety of pens and dens can be used for badgers. While no definite plan of construction has been devised, there are certain fundamental rules that should be observed. Sufficient space should be given for exercise, and the inclosure should be so made as to prevent escape of the animals. The floor should be either of heavy rocks or concrete or else of earth and covered with heavy woven wire such as that used for the sides, so as to prevent the animals from burrowing out. The den should be well ventilated, and may be either above or below the surface of the ground. The pens should be on well-drained soil, with both shade and sunlight.

FEEDING:

Badgers in the wild subsist largely on ground squirrels and other small animals. In captivity their food may consist of a mixture of cereals, milk, eggs, and meat. The definite quantity of food required has not been determined, but it is usually safe to give as much as the animals will readily clean up. The ration used on most fox farms appears to be suitable. In cold climates prior to hibernation badgers usually require more food than at other times. The practice of feeding once daily is followed on some fur farms. On others, two feedings a day are given with good results.

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BREEDING:

There is a conflict of testimony as to the actual dates of breeding. Some assert that it is in the fall season, while others state that it occurs during March and April. The breeding season and the length of the gestation period will remain in doubt until further series of experiments and observations have been made. It is known, however, that only one litter a year is produced, usually in May or June. The number in the litter may vary from one to seven, though it probably averages about four. At the Fur-Animal Experiment Station maintained by the Biological Survey in the Adirondack region, experiments in the propagation of badgers are in progress, and it is hoped that these may give the solution of many present problems in the habits of the animals and in methods of raising them on fur farms.

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